

Cabinet



Date of meeting:	11 December 2023
Title of Report:	Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee Recommendation: Council Tax Exemption
Lead Member:	Councillor Zoe Reilly, Chair of Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Interim Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Jake Metcalfe, Democratic Advisor
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Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

On 07 November 2023 the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee met to consider the item 'Council Tax Exemption for Plymouth City Council Foster Carers' following an amendment to a Motion on Notice heard at Council on 18 September 2023. Following discussion, the Committee agreed to recommend to Cabinet 'that a Council Tax Exemption for foster carers is considered following the conclusion of the consultation on proposed new Support and Retention Offer to Our Foster Carers'.

Recommendations and Reasons

That Cabinet considers the recommendation agreed at Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Cabinet is required to take into account feedback from the scrutiny function.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The system of Scrutiny is an essential element of Local Government governance and by considering comments from Education and Children's Social Care Overview Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet is supporting the "Democracy" value as defined in the Corporate Plan.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The financial implications would need to be considered by Cabinets response.

Financial Risks

None arising from this report.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None arising from this report.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

None arising from this report.

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	JS/01/ 12/23 /01	Leg	JS/01/ 12/23 /02	Mon Off		HR		Assets		Strat Proc	
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: N/A											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 01/12/23											
Approval: Councillor Zoe Riley											
Date approved: 01/12/23											

Minute 31: Council Tax Exemption for Plymouth City Council Foster Carers

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) and Nigel Denning (Interim Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Council Tax exemption scheme for internal foster carers and connected carers, approved by Plymouth City Council would be considered under a new support and retention offer to support Plymouth City Council foster carers and was being considered and developed;
- b) The Council wanted to provide a package of support to its foster carers and potential new foster carers to promote a package that made it worthwhile to recruit and then maintain its foster carer numbers. The package would ensure that local authority foster carers felt valued and underline why the council thought it was best to be a local authority foster carer;
- c) The Council was trying to ensure that would be more local authority foster carers to that of independent foster carers recruited and provided by an agency;
- d) The Council acknowledged that it was required to think differently around recruitment due to there not being a net gain of foster carers, primarily due to the numbers of foster carers retiring to that that were being recruited. A Council tax exemption was a measure that the service would like considered alongside a support package of which foster carers had advised was equally important as the financial aspects;
- e) There were a number of children/young people in high cost placements and the service discussed that it could do things differently around recruiting a different kind of foster carer under different arrangements that could help Plymouth's more challenged children and bring them back to the city and look after them more closely;
- f) There would be a foster carer summit arranged and through that a set of proposals would be developed and costed which would then proceed alongside a proposed council tax exemption to make Plymouth's offer competitive against the independent sector.

In response to questions raised, it was reported that:

- a) Councillors were encouraged to take part in the Foster Carer summit where proposals would be formulated as part of the support and retention offer. Care experienced young people would also be encouraged to attend. The council would like to foster care summit to be run independently and would contact the Foster Carer network to facilitate;
- b) The Council was required to look at providing offers that the independent sector could not offer and the Council Tax exemption would set the council apart;

- c) Local Authority foster carers were the council's biggest recruiters through word of mouth and through them being part of the discussions and advising the council on a range of proposals would be advantageous;
- d) Training for foster carers would be part of the package, particularly around therapeutic support for Plymouth's children. It was acknowledged that being a foster carer over a relatively short period had changed significantly and training would need to keep pace;
- e) It was acknowledged that the Children's service required a lot of the Council's budget and with decreasing funding from national government and the increasing costs, the council had to find ways to mitigate those costs;
- f) Foster carers had made it clear that money was not the drive for them and that they preferred more support and the ability to have a conversation with a practitioner when dealing with a complex child/young person. It was acknowledged that the Council had to find ways to provide this support;
- g) The council would be taking part in an initiative across the region involving 15 councils in which the Department for Education would be providing additional resource from April 2024 in which all the marketing and advertising for foster carer recruitment would go to a virtual hub in the southwest. It would also be an opportunity for the council to understand the other offers from the authorities in the region;
- h) Plymouth staff were good at building relationships with those that had expressed an interest in becoming a local authority foster carer and were providing support all along the way of their journey to become a foster carer. Once someone had shown an interest, contact would be made within 48 hours to make an initial visit;
- i) Foster carer allowances would be considered under the support and retention proposals to ensure competitiveness and also to acknowledge the cost of living crisis;
- j) The Council would look into support for planning applications as part of the package should potential/existing foster carers want to make additions to their homes to provide placements to Plymouth's children and young people

The Committee agreed unanimously to:

- Recommend to Cabinet that a Council Tax Exemption for foster carers is considered following the conclusion of the consultation on proposed new Support and Retention Offer to Our Foster Carers.